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## **Katame-Waza and Control Maintenance**

**by David M. Valadez**

What is the strategic priority of Katame-Waza (trans. pinning techniques)? In what way does Katame-Waza tactically relate to the rest of Kihon-Waza? Surely, it is not a matter of needing pinning techniques to fill holes in an arsenal that includes throws, strikes, chokes, kicks, etc. While the universality of tactical application is an old concept, the “salad bar” mentality that has one searching for a “well-roundedness” that never comes is a modern one. The idea that we can better address the unknowable by having a little bit of everything at our disposal is based upon a misunderstanding of the philosophical foundations at work in Budo pedagogy; foundations which suggest that universality comes only from a transcendence of technique, not from a multiplicity of technique.

Still, on the other hand, it would be equally misleading to posit that pinning techniques can or should address all tactical situations. They do not. So inferior is this position, strategically speaking, that the person who from the onset decides to do, or looks to do, Katame-Waza can only be described as naive. They would be naive in their likely course of action to let someone close the gap to a degree considered “conducive” to pinning. They would be naive in their likely preoccupation with the limb of the attacker. They would be naive in their passing over of more efficient tactics in favor of pinning. Moreover, in their training, they would be naive in having seen Katame-Waza as self-defense solutions and thereby in reifying the grab as a legitimate impetus for counter-action.

Pins, locks, traps, do not have to be one element, one ingredient of a larger composite. Nor do they have to be universalized in and of themselves. Like strikes, like throws, etc., pins have their own proper place and time. This place and time manifests itself outside of our will to be well rounded or to be universal. We ourselves are subject to this specificity of place and time. This is why we can say, rather than seeking to execute a pin or a lock, we simply fall into the lock or the pin. Never choosing to pin, never seeking to pin, never hoping to pin, instead, because of proper tai-sabaki, proper ashi-sabaki, and proper te-sabaki, the pin or lock happens instantaneously and naturally, more of its own accord than of ours. Pinning, trapping, locking, are more akin to the natural act that plays between the fly, the spider, and the web, than to the culinary pursuits of those that wish to bake the “perfect” martial art by adding ingredient after ingredient to the mix.

Of primary importance in bridging the gap between proper bodywork, footwork, and handwork, on the one side, and pinning or locking basics, on the other, is the concept of Control Maintenance. Control Maintenance is the web of Katame-Waza. Through Control Maintenance, pins find their own tactical possibility - that place-time where they are born of their own accord. It is through Control Maintenance

that uke's Line of Gravity never again fully reenters his/her Base of Support; that we never lose our possession over the Angle of Disturbance - that Kuzushi is never forfeited once gained. It is through Control Maintenance that transitions between pins, between throws and pins, and between strikes and pins, etc., becomes possible; that we can tap into the adaptability of pins; that we can merge pins and locks with the rest of our tactical options. Thus, it is via Control Maintenance that we gain both the opportunity to pin and the efficiency of our pins.

Moreover, it is in Control Maintenance that the stability of our stance is most tested and thus cultivated; the stability of our mind is most tested and thus cultivated; the stability of our training is most tested and thus cultivated; and the durability of our spirit is most tested and thus cultivated. Hence, it is in Control Maintenance, or in the training of the strategy of never forfeiting dominance once gained, that these things are refined and that expertise is gained, that our Aikido is deepened, and that our pinning tactics actually become martially viable.

If we prepare ourselves to pin, our opponent will escape. If we think of pinning, our opponent will escape. If we lack Control Maintenance, because we alter our grip and/or because we have no redundancy between our traps that allows for adjustments without creating suki (trans. holes or openings), our opponent escapes. If we pin in an outward direction, rather than inwardly, under our center, our opponent escapes. If we apply lifting and/or transverse energies when we should be applying downward energy, our opponent escapes. If we wait for our opponent to stop moving before we commence our pin, he/she will escape. Therefore, the lesson of pinning is this: Try to pin and you will fail. Do not try to pin and you will fail.